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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, here we are, at the beginning of the unofficial start of summer. Yep, it's Memorial Day weekend again. Get those barbecues fired up, the beer chilled, and the hammock tied up. I like this time of year. The lawn is looking good, having been mowed a few times already. Time to start planning my annual gardens - flowers and veggies. I better start up the tiller because the soil will need to be turned first! Then it will be time to order and spread some mulch. And yes, we'll probably get the pool opened up this weekend also.

The weather has finally started to improve some more. The days of rain and cold have passed us; the sun and heat has returned - over 90 degrees here today! I've been on the golf course a few times the past couple of weeks, but my game isn't improving too much! Must be getting old because the aches and kinks just don't seem to go away these days!

Well, I don't know about the rest of you, but I still need to finish up making plans for the long holiday weekend. The food is bought, plenty of gas for the grill - oops, need more beer! So, so far, the weekend projects are scheduled - now just have to make sure I plan my time effectively!

And please remember, it's a long holiday weekend, so party appropriately. Designated drivers are a wonderful thing! Be safe, and enjoy!

Until next time...

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CDLab 0.91 Released

CDLab 0.91 is available.
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/cdlab/v0.91/CDLAB091.ZIP
A CD-R burning tool for Atari-compatible computers.

New features

- New audio formats for audio extraction. (AU/SND, AIFF, AIFF Cubase Audio).
- Filenames mask for audio extraction.
- Interface improvement in Monochrome.

Main features

- Audio track extraction.
- CD-RW blanking function.
- DAO (Disc-At-Once) copy for any single-session discs. (But it doesn't work with my MMC compliant drive)
- TAO (Track-At-Once) multisession mode.

You need the SCSIDRV interface. (already included in HDDriver)
You can also run this program before CDLab.
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/scsidrv/SCSIDRV.PRG

CDLab is now released under terms of the GNU General Public License.
The source code can be retrieved here:
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/cdlab/v0.91/

Original Francois GALEA website:
http://fgalea.free.fr/cdlab/

Yvan Doyeux
URL: http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/cdlab/v0.91/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Due to the sparseness of messages in the Atari newsgroups the past couple of weeks, there will be no People Are Talking column this week.

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->In This Week's Gaming Section
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""
- 80GB PlayStation 3 Due!
  StarCraft 2 Announced!
  Super Paper Mario!
  And more!

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Sony Launching 80GB PlayStation 3

Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. (SCEI) plans to launch a version of its PlayStation 3 console with an 80G-byte, hard-disk drive in June, it said Monday.

The new PlayStation 3 model will go on sale first in South Korea when Sony kicks off PlayStation 3 sales there on June 16. It will cost 518,000 won (US$581).

The console, which launched in late 2006 in the U.S. and Japan, typically comes with a 60G-byte, hard-disk drive. In some markets SCEI offers a second version with a 20G-byte drive although sales are being discontinued in favor of the higher capacity model, which has sold considerably better.

The 80G-byte model could appear in other markets.

"At this time there are no concrete plans [to sell the model in other markets] however it could be an option to introduce it in other regions but it needs to be decided by each region," said Satoshi Fukuoka, a spokesman for SCEI in Tokyo. The machine otherwise has a similar specification to the existing PlayStation 3 model with a 60G-byte drive, he said.

The company decided to put a higher capacity hard-disk drive in the model sold in South Korea because of the nation's pervasive broadband Internet network, said Fukuoka. Sony is keen to see the PlayStation 3 used for entertainment beyond games and South Koreans are already used to a wide variety of online multimedia.

News that Sony was planning an 80G-byte model of the console first came in a U.S. regulatory filing with the Federal Communications Commission in March. At the time the company declined to comment on product plans.

Blizzard Officially Announces StarCraft 2

Yes, StarCraft 2 is real. Beyond what we've already communicated to you about the sequel (and what you can see in the trailer), Blizzard released a press release to put a little more info out there to digest.

Here are the promises Blizzard is making with StarCraft 2:

o Races will be further distinguished from one another through new gameplay mechanics and new units.

o Some of the original units will also be receiving new abilities, but it is unclear which ones are included at present.

o Uses a 3D engine that "realistic physics and the ability to render several large, highly detailed units and massive armies on-screen simultaneously."

o The map editor is returning - huzzah!

o And - shocker - there will be both a single player and multiplayer version of the game.

o It will be released for both the Mac and PC.

o No release date currently exists.

"With StarCraft II, we'll be able to do everything we wanted to do with the original StarCraft and more," stated Mike Morhaime, president and cofounder of Blizzard Entertainment. "We recognize that expectations are high following the long-running popularity of the original game, but we plan to meet those expectations and deliver an engaging, action-packed, competitive experience that StarCraft players and strategy gamers worldwide will enjoy."

The wait for this day is over. Now the wait until the game's release begins.

Xbox Alive With "Heroes"

Universal Studios Consumer Products Group has released content based on the NBC hit series "Heroes" on Xbox Live.

For the first time, fans of the series can customize their Xbox 360 experience with theme packs and gamer pictures downloaded from the Xbox Live Marketplace. Gamers will be able to decorate their Xbox Live portal with rendered paintings from the series, as well as photos featuring "Heroes" characters as avatars.

Despite the connection with gamers, the show itself has not yet been made available for digital distribution through the Xbox Live Marketplace. The only NBC series available on the popular service, which is second only to Apple's iTunes, is "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip."

'Super Paper Mario' Is Super

Just when you thought the beloved plumber Mario might be nearing the twilight of his more-than quarter-century career, Nintendo comes out with a game for the Wii that pumps new life into two retro video game genres.

"Super Paper Mario" (Rated E, $49.99) combines the charm and action of an '80s side-scroller with the depth and creativity of a solid role-playing game.

This hybrid of sorts of "Super Mario Bros." and "Paper Mario" features an elaborate and well-written back story that's explained in detail during a rather long opening sequence.

Here's the quick version: The villainous Count Bleck captures Princess Peach and forces her to marry the spiked-shell turtle Bowser, which creates a rift of dark energy. Mario and his friends must gather eight

"pure hearts" to restore the universe to its normal state.

Mario begins his quest in the town of Flipside, which seems a bit sparse at first glance but grows dramatically in size and usefulness as the game progresses. This is base camp, where you can explore the different shops, chat with residents and buy items between quests.

Dialogue comes in the form of scrolling text - which is usually clever and downright funny at times - but, unlike turn-based adventures, all of the game’s action and battles are real-time.

"Super Paper Mario" embraces its retro roots from the start.

Control comes from the standard Wii remote rotated 90 degrees to the left, which emulates a rectangular NES-style game pad with a four-directional stick and three buttons.

The game follows the well-worn formula of four levels per chapter, with each chapter culminating with a boss battle that features one of Count Bleck’s cronies.

But by the end of the opening level - which begins as a two-dimensional tribute to Level 1-1 of the original "Super Mario Bros." - the game starts to how its depth.

Mario embarks on his journey with the help of Tippi, one of an assortment of fairy-like "pixls" that give the characters special abilities. If it seems you’ve exhausted your options, point the Wii remote at the screen and Tippi will reveal secret doors, blocks or staircases to help you move on.

Mario soon learns how to flip worlds into three dimensions, and this is where the game really sets itself apart. Levels take on entirely different looks, as some objects and bad guys remain as paper-thin 2-D sprites while others take on a 3-D form. It’s an odd concept at first, but it becomes second nature within a couple of levels.

This power is limited, allowing Mario to flip to avoid a large rolling bad guy or get around a tall pipe, then return to 2-D before the meter runs out.

As the game progresses, Mario is joined by friends who each boast their own special ability. Luigi can jump higher than his brother, Princess Peach uses an umbrella to float to higher destinations and Bowser can inflict heavier damage on opponents.

The ability to flip between dimensions is limited to Mario, but other "pixls" allow all the game’s characters to grab enemies and throw them, become paper thin or place bombs.

The role-playing side of "Super Paper Mario" moves the plot forward, but having to continually press buttons to scroll through text when you’re itching to do battle can grow tedious at times.

But that’s about the only gripe.

"Super Paper Mario" seamlessly blends two genres and splashes in enough humor and obscure references to provide hours of fun.

Three and a half stars out of four.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. House Approves Less Stringent Anti-Spyware Bill

The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation on Tuesday that would impose specific penalties for the fraudulent use of spyware but would not impose new requirements on software makers.

House lawmakers approved a bill providing for up to five years in jail for those who use spyware to commit fraud but stops short of regulatory requirements sought by some lawmakers.

"It targets the worst forms of spyware without unduly burdening technological innovation," said Democratic Rep. Zoe Lofgren of California, chief sponsor of the bill which passed on a voice vote.

Spyware has emerged as a major headache for computer users. It can end up on users' computers through a virus or through downloaded games or other free programs off the Internet.

Spyware can sap computing power, crash machines and bury users under a blizzard of unwanted ads. Scam artists can use spyware to capture passwords, account numbers and other sensitive personal data.

The bill passed by the House on Tuesday is supported by the software industry. It omits provisions in competing legislation endorsed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee that would require software distributors and advertisers to clearly notify and obtain consent from consumers before programs can be loaded onto a computer.

Lofgren said those types of requirements could hurt innovation and technology investment.

"Focusing on bad actors and criminal conduct is preferable to an approach that criminalizes technology or imposes notice- or consent-type requirements," Lofgren said.

There is currently no similar legislation in the Senate.

Spyware Bill's Chances Uncertain in Senate

An antispyware bill that the U.S. House of Representatives passed this week earned praise from cybersecurity groups, but faces an uncertain future in the Senate.

The bill, which would create penalties of up to five years in prison for some spyware-like behavior, is a "needed piece of legislation in order to protect consumers," said Kevin Richards, federal government relations manager for Symantec Corp. Many online identity theft schemes start with spyware on a victim’s computer, he said.

Though versions of the Internet Spyware Prevention Act (I-SPY) have passed through the House in the last two sessions of Congress, they stalled in the Senate. The House passed I-SPY and a second spyware bill in May 2005. But the Senate failed to act, partly because of concerns that the second proposal, called the Securely Protect Yourself Against Cyber Trespass Act or SPY Act, too broadly defined spyware.

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee also became hung up on what approach to take for a spyware bill - a criminal penalties approach similar to I-SPY or a broader approach attempting to define spyware technologies similar to the second House bill.

Concerns over the SPY Act remain. Last month, the Electronic Frontier Foundation issued an alert about the SPY Act, saying it opposes the bill because it would preempt tougher state laws against spyware and hacking. "In fact, having been massaged by lobbyists for the software and adware industries, the bill would actually make things worse, insulating adware vendors from more stringent state laws and private lawsuits," wrote EFF lawyer Fred von Lohmann.

Any bills that have not passed through the House and Senate during their two-year session must be reintroduced. This year the SPY Act has been approved by the House Energy and Commerce Committee but has not faced a vote on the House floor.

On the other hand, there seems to be less opposition to I-SPY. I-SPY has "broad support from the industry," said Geoff Gray, legislative consultant for the Cyber Security Industry Alliance, a trade group. "It concentrates on bad actions as opposed to bad technologies."

I-SPY now goes to the Senate for consideration. Two champions of antispyware legislation in the Senate, Republicans George Allen of Virginia and Conrad Burns of Montana, were defeated in last November’s elections.

Meanwhile, supporters of the I-SPY Act say they will push for passage in the Senate. Symantec is engaging senators about the need for a spyware bill and other cybersecurity measures, Richards said. Several senators seem open to cybersecurity legislation, he said.

"I think there’s interest there," he said. "But senators are focused on a big plate of issues."

Although Burns and Allen are gone, I-SPY has a "decent" chance of passing the Senate, added Gray. The House may have given it a better shot by not passing the more controversial SPY Act at the same time, he said.

"A little steam has gone out of it on the Senate side, but maybe some of the conflict as well," Gray said.

A spokesman for Representative Zoe Lofgren, one of the primary sponsors of I-SPY, said it’s early to gauge the bill’s chances in the Senate. The California Democrat will begin pushing for the bill in the Senate soon, the spokesman said.

Representatives of tech-focused senators said their bosses are looking at antispyware legislation. "It’s one of our priorities," said a spokesman for Senator John Ensign, a Nevada Republican and cosponsor of an antispyware bill in the last session of Congress.

Senator Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, is also looking into the issue, a spokeswoman said. Wyden, cosponsor of the broader antispyware bill in the Senate last Congress, is "looking into what he feels the correct course should be legislatively... based on the way the spyware issue has evolved over the last two years," said spokeswoman Melissa Merz.

Local Governments Urge Caution On Internet Tax Ban

The U.S. Congress should think twice about making a temporary moratorium on Internet access taxes permanent, groups representing local governments said Tuesday.

Representatives of the National Governors Association, the AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees) and the Oklahoma Tax Commission said they could support another temporary extension to the ban on Internet access taxes and other taxes unique to the Internet.

"We would urge this committee to use extreme caution whenever you take action that infringes upon the rights of states to set their own tax policy," Jerry Johnson, vice chairman of the Oklahoma Tax Commission, told the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law.

Many states face difficulties in raising other taxes to pay for services, Johnson said. Congressional bans on certain taxes impede state governments’ abilities to keep their tax systems "fair and broad," he said.

Three bills in Congress would permanently extend the ban on Internet-only taxes. The current moratorium expires Nov. 1.

Congress shouldn’t take away the ability of local and state governments to raise taxes and pay for essential services like police and firefighters, said Mark Murphy, a fiscal policy analyst with AFSCME. Two recent studies, including one by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, suggested that the tax moratorium has no real effect on the number of people buying broadband access, even though congressional supporters say broadband adoption is a major eason for the ban, he said.

Others at a hearing on the Internet tax moratorium disagreed, saying higher broadband costs would hurt adoption.

The average U.S. family already pays $250 a year in taxes on communications services, said John Rutledge, senior fellow at The Heartland Institute, a Chicago-based free market think tank. "If you release the moratorium, I think you’re going to have very major tax increases," he said. "That’s something that would be detrimental to productivity and [economic] growth."

Scott Mackey, an economist at government relations and consulting firm Kimbell Sherman Ellis, agreed. "As an economist, I have to believe taxes

do matter," he said. "Clearly, taxes and prices do matter to consumers."

If Congress does extend the moratorium, it should make clear that other communications bundled with Internet access, such as VoIP service are not exempt from taxes, said Oklahoma's Johnson.

Murphy and David Quam, director of federal relations for the National Governors Association, said their organizations would support temporary moratoriums of two to four years.

But Representative William Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat, and other subcommittee members said they support a permanent ban. Internet access taxes would hit poor people the hardest, several subcommittee members suggested.

Delahunt also questioned numbers from state governments suggesting the ban costs them billions of dollars a year. "What we're talking here is chump change when we're talking about the revenue sources of the states," he said.

Is The CAN-SPAM Act Working?

In December 2003, with a great deal of fanfare, Congress passed the Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act, which is far better known by its acronym, the CAN-SPAM Act.

Speaking on the floor of the Senate, Ron Wyden (D-Or.) said at the time of its passage that the CAN-SPAM legislation would not be a silver bullet.

"But when this bill takes effect," he said, "the big-time spammers who up to this point faced no consequences, for all practical purposes, will suddenly be at risk for criminal prosecution, Federal Trade Commission enforcement, and million-dollar lawsuits by State attorneys general and Internet service providers."

The intervening four years have shown mixed results for Senator Wyden's prediction.

According to a new survey released Wednesday by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, more e-mail users today report an increase in spam (37 percent) than did so in February 2004 (24 percent), which is just after the CAN-SPAM Act went into effect.

On the other hand, over the same time period, there has been a significant drop in the number of people (52 percent, down from 71) who report receiving pornographic spam, which was obviously one of the main legislative targets of the CAN-SPAM Act.

The author of the Pew study, Deborah Fallows, said in an e-mail interview that she felt that the CAN-SPAM Act has had a positive effect on the spam problem. "The CAN-SPAM Act has gone a long way toward giving teeth to legal efforts," she said. "The law makes it riskier to be a spammer."

Mark Rotenberg, the Executive Director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, said that in his view, the results of the Pew survey show that antispam filters have improved over the last few years. "It is much less likely that offensive text messages will make it through filters

today than in the past," Rotenberg said.

Fallows agreed. "Spam filters go a long way toward keeping spam out of inboxes," she said. "But everyone needs to use them, and they aren't perfect." As Rotenberg pointed out, for instance, many spam filters have problems identifying and blocking image-based spam.

The other point that Fallows made, both in her report and in her e-mail, is that spam will remain a problem as long as it is an economically viable advertising tool. "As long as people continue ordering products or services from spam, or responding to queries in spam for personal information," Fallows noted, "it will be worth someone's while to be a spammer."

And according to the Pew report, that's still a problem. Just under one-quarter (23 percent) of e-mail users admit having knowingly clicked on a spam message for more information, and 4 percent have contributed to the life-blood of the spam industry by ordering a product or agreeing to process Nigerian bank funds. Caveat lector - let the reader beware.

Code Green Gives Red Light to Data Leaks

Reports of corporate data leaks, lost laptops, and misplaced backup tapes are so commonplace that many no longer warrant a mention in the press. So common are corporate data leaks of one form or another that only the multimegaton events - TJX, the Veterans Administration, or DuPont - get covered.

But the data leak problem sure has gotten the attention of corporate boardrooms, even if the media has moved on. For proof of that, look no further than the gaggle of data leak prevention companies that has popped up in recent years. We've already heard this month about startup Provilla, as well as Varonis. Code Green Networks is another aspiring startup that hopes to bring high-end data leak prevention technology to smaller and midsize corporations.

Founded in late 2004, Code Green is the brainchild of Shreekampt and Sudhakar Ravi, both co-founders of security appliance maker Sonicwall. Started with seed money from its two founders, the company has taken in $32 million in venture funding to date and now has 65 employees, says Chip Hay, senior vice president for marketing and customer care at Code Green.

Data leaks aren't just bad publicity for companies, they're also expensive, Hay says. Citing a recent study by the Ponemon Institute, Hay says that lost customer records can cost as much as $182 each to remediate, not counting penalties and legal ramifications from the growing matrix of state and federal data protection and consumer privacy laws. Those factors have stoked enterprise interest in data protection products.

"The big change for us in the last nine months is that we've gone from talking to companies who want to get educated, and now they've decided that [they] want to put data leak prevention in place," Hay says.

Companies - especially in fields such as high technology - are also paying attention to protecting their core intellectual property, especially with outsourcing and complex business partner relationships exposing more and more data, he says.

Code Green’s flagship product is a content inspection appliance that’s installed at egress points on customer networks. The device can inspect SMTP, e-mail, FTP, and IM traffic, among others, and can run in-line to block suspicious traffic or in asynchronous mode to monitor actions and policy enforcement, Hay says.

At the heart of Code Green’s technology are algorithms that were originally designed to spot plagiarism in different samples of writing, Hay says. That technology, which analyzes content bit patterns, allows Code Green to spot sensitive information without relying on fallible dictionaries of terms, and without regard to the language used to express the sensitive information. That, and the product’s support for more than 400 document formats, allows Code Green to sell into markets like Japan and China, Hay says.

That’s increasingly important, amid concern about rampant intellectual property theft - some of it state sponsored. For example, one Code Green customer recently reported finding proprietary manufacturing process documents published in a Chinese language publication, Hay says.

The company also prides itself on its product’s capability to parse message traffic from the sea of Web-based e-mail providers, where no standard message formats are used. Code Green has also forged strategic partnerships with vendors such as Voltage Security for e-mail encryption and with Centennial Software to reach the SMB market.

A new version of the Code Green appliance due out soon will offer enhanced data fingerprinting for reading data in relational databases, and structured and flat files - as well as better content discovery features. The product already sports connectors to Oracle and Microsoft SQL server and EMC’s Documentum content management platform.

Laptop for Poor Kids Caught in Crossfire

The nonprofit initiative to provide a low-cost laptop to the world’s poorest children might have sparked a new market - and harsh competition. On Sunday’s 60 Minutes show on CBS, One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) head Nicholas Negroponte accused Intel of being "predatory" in its efforts to compete in that market.

Intel’s is "dumping" another low-cost laptop at less than cost, the MIT professor said in the CBS report. "Intel," he added, "should be ashamed of itself." He also contended that, because OLPC uses a microprocessor made by Intel’s archrival, AMD, the OLPC effort is caught in the crossfire.

"Intel has hurt the mission enormously," he said.

Craig Barrett, Intel’s chairman of the board, said on the show that there are "lots of opportunities" for Intel and OLPC to work together. "That’s why when you say this is competition, we’re tying to drive him out of business - this is crazy."

Intel’s low-cost computer, the Classmate, is shown in the report being used in a classroom in Malinalco, Mexico. Information on Intel’s Web site indicates the company is targeting such markets as Brazil, Mexico, and India with the Classmate.

Later in the story, CBS correspondent Lesley Stahl showed Barrett several Intel marketing documents used to sell the Classmate to Nigeria. At least one showed a chart comparing the Classmate favorably against the OLPC device. Barrett responded that "someone at Intel was comparing the Classmate PC with another device being offered in the marketplace. That's the way our business works."

Intel is but one company looking to developing nations as a new market opportunity. Quanta Computer, which will manufacture the OLPC machines, is reported to be working with Microsoft to develop a low-cost Windows laptop for those countries. And Microsoft has announced that it is selling a Windows package of XP Starter Edition and several applications for $3 in developing countries. In addition, Thailand and Malaysia have sponsored projects to develop laptops that can be sold for less than $400.

The highly visible CBS report has caused people to focus on the war of words between Negroponte and Barrett, said Samir Bhavnani, research director at Current Analysis West, and "taken the focus off the main goal" of providing low-cost laptops in emerging economies.

Bhavnani said he has read reports where Intel has acknowledged that it is selling the Classmate "below cost," because Intel wants "to get a piece of what's happening." But he said this strategy isn't necessarily unusual. "Sony sells the PlayStation below cost," he noted, as it tries to make its profit on software.

At the very least, he said, the OLPC effort has sparked the market in developing nations for very low-cost computers, and some of the technical advancements might eventually benefit the entire computer ecosystem.

But Bhavnani also said there are no indications it would drive similar efforts in the U.S. and other developed countries, because the $100 to $200 laptops are "not as powerful, not as full-featured" as what markets here require. Besides, he said, on occasion one already can find a laptop in the U.S. for $399 or less.

The OLPC effort, founded two years ago, originally sought a price-point of $100 for the laptops, but has since said that the initial price will be about $175. The price might drop to $100 with volume, the nonprofit organization has said. There are also reports that OLPC expects to begin shipping the units in October.

The CBS report did indicate that the laptops could become available in the U.S. at some point, although purchasers would have to buy two - one for themselves and one as a donated laptop for a poor child.

EarthLink to Build Out Full Philadelphia Wi-Fi Network

The sun came out for EarthLink's Philadelphia Wi-Fi network on Thursday even as prospects for its San Francisco project remain shrouded in fog.

Wireless Philadelphia, a nonprofit group formed by the city of Philadelphia, has approved the 15-square-mile Wi-Fi test network EarthLink Inc. built, opening the door for the operator to finish building out a 135-square-mile network covering the city.

The approval comes just a month after EarthLink announced it would scale back its city Wi-Fi initiative, focusing on existing and large cities for the rest of the year. The company has seven or eight cities under contract now and is negotiating with five more, Vice President of Product Strategy and Marketing Cole Reinwand said last week. It decided to stagger its Wi-Fi expansion to conserve resources, he said.

Residents can already use the 15-square-mile network in Philadelphia. The full network is expected to be complete in the third quarter. EarthLink is financing, building and managing the network and will share revenue with Wireless Philadelphia, which will offer cut-rate access for low-income people.

For six months, customers of a 1M bps (bits per second service) will pay an introductory rate of US$6.95 per month, which bumps up to $19.95 thereafter. A faster 3M bps service is available for $9.95 for the first six months and $21.95 after that.

City parks will have free access, and low-income residents can sign up for service at $9.95 per month, before promotions. Customers can also pay for service on an hourly, daily or three-day basis.

The Philadelphia Wi-Fi network is notable because when announced, it set off a storm of controversy that resulted in a Pennsylvania law requiring municipalities to receive approval from incumbent telecommunications operators before building Wi-Fi networks. The law was created after incumbents complained that by financing Wi-Fi networks, cities were building networks that would compete with their businesses.

The San Francisco project, which has drawn attention partly because of Google Inc.’s planned involvement as provider of a free citywide service, has run into fierce opposition from activists as well as some local elected officials. The proposed contract is scheduled for a vote by the city and county’s board of supervisors in July.

Spam Volume Up, Angst Down

A study by Senior Research Fellow Deborah Fallows of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, which studies the impact of the Internet on society, indicates that users are reporting an increase in the amount of spam they are seeing. But a combination of increasing user sophistication and moderation of pornographic spam, considered the most offensive form, makes them less bothered by it.

A slight majority of users are seeing the same amount of spam in their home and work accounts, but 37 percent are seeing more spam in their personal account and 29 percent are seeing more in their work account, while much lower numbers of users are seeing less (10 percent for home, 8 percent for work).

The number of users who consider spam a big problem or one that made e-mail unpleasant has gone down over the last few years of this survey.

Users are also getting more savvy about spam, recognizing it more readily and not clicking on things as much. They are also more likely to be running spam filtering software.

’Harmless’ Worm Hops Past OpenOffice Security

The first cross-platform worm specifically tailored for the open-source OpenOffice.org and StarOffice productivity suites has raised a few hackles in open source circles, since it appears to tarnish the suite’s reputation for security.

In some ways, the worm, which Sophos calls SB/Badbunny-A, is insignificant - it is not very well written, and is so unlikely to spread that the virus writers emailed it to Sophos themselves, the company said.

What has open source fans riled, however, is the fact that a functional worm exists at all that can exploit OpenOffice’s scripting features to carry out potentially malicious actions and to spread over the internet.

Macro viruses have been around for decades and are a well-known problem for Microsoft Office. That makes it all the more perplexing, some industry commentators said, that a proof-of-concept worm has been put together that can exploit the relatively new, open source OpenOffice suite in exactly the same way.

Badbunny executes when a user opens a file called badbunny.odg. It attempts to download and display an indecent picture of a man in a bunny suit performing a sexual act in the woods, according to Sophos.

The worm carries out different actions depending on the operating system, working on Mac OS X, Linux and Windows, the company said. On Linux it attempts to spread via XChat or mIRC scripts.

Sophos director Mark Harris said the worm appeared to have been written solely to prove that OpenOffice and StarOffice can easily support such malware.

"This harks back to the old days of malware when it was written to show off computer prowess," Harris said in a blog post. "The focus has changed over the years and is now about making money."

Some in the open source community said it was absurd that no mechanism has been put in place, even in modern, open source applications, to do away with such dangers as macro viruses.

"We’ve known about macro viruses for 20 years, and the danger of putting executable code in documents for about the same, and yet, in 2007, an open-source application, backed by a major Unix vendor is released with this vulnerability?" wrote one reader on the Slashdot discussion site. "Apparently many eyes do not make bugs shallow."

Bills Add E-mail to Sex Offender Lists

Connecticut and at least a dozen other states are considering whether to require convicted sex offenders to register their e-mail addresses as part of efforts to combat online sexual predators.

Three states - Virginia, Arizona and Kentucky - already require sex offenders to provide law enforcement with their e-mail addresses, as well as their home addresses.

The bills have support from the popular social networking site MySpace.com, which has been under increasing pressure to ferret out convicted child molesters and stop them from creating online profiles.

Connecticut's proposal would require sex offenders to register any e-mail addresses, instant message addresses or other Internet identifiers with the state police. Those who don't report the information would face up to five years in prison.

It also makes it a felony for any person to misrepresent his or her age on the Internet to entice a minor to engage in sexual activity.

The bill passed the state House on a vote of 149-0 on Thursday and awaits action in the Senate. It would be part of the state's version of Megan's Law, named after a 7-year-old New Jersey girl who was raped and murdered in 1994 by a sex offender who lived across the street.

"Megan's Law is based on keeping track of where sex offenders reside. So it makes sense to track their location in cyberspace," said Connecticut House Speaker James Amann. "The Internet represents a new frontier of sex predators."

MySpace says 13 other states are considering similar bills and is lobbying for similar legislation on the national level.

"Our laws need to change with the times," said the company's chief security officer, Hemanshu Nigam. "We can no longer unwittingly provide an advantage to predators online."

Typical MySpace profiles include photos, music and personal information, including hometowns and education. Users can send messages to one another and browse other profiles.

The company said Thursday that it has removed 7,000 registered sex offenders' profiles from its site after hiring a software company to identify them.

"Mandatory sex offender e-mail registration legislation would significantly expedite this process and help keep sex offenders off our sites," Nigam said.

Myspace balked last week when the attorneys general of eight states asked that the company share information on sex offenders, saying the information was protected under federal privacy laws. It agreed to release the data Monday after some of the officials filed subpoenas, which Myspace said was required under the Electronic Communications Privacy Act.

Indian PC Dealers Strike Against Microsoft

Computer dealers in India are growing increasingly agitated at Microsoft Corp.'s attempts to clamp down on the use of pirated software in the country.

Dealers in the western state of Gujarat went on strike last week to protest notices served by Microsoft to 13 dealers, accusing them of shipping pirated copies of Windows with their computers. They now hope to extend the action to other states.

Bharat Randeri, president of the South Gujarat Information Technologists Association (SITA), said it is never a policy at computer dealers in the state to install pirated software. "We are not installing pirated software on the computers we sell," he said on Monday.

However, he admitted that individual staff sometimes install pirated software at the request of customers. Some customers want to use pirated software because the price of legal software is too high for them, Randeri said.

SITA hopes to extend its strike action to other states and is prepared to try and pressure Microsoft into withdrawing its complaint notices.

"We have been approached by dealers in other states who are also being harassed by Microsoft," Randeri said. "If Microsoft does not cooperate, we will tell our dealers to migrate to Linux."

Seven of the notices from Microsoft were served last year, followed by a further six this year, he said.

PC vendors in India, particularly those selling unbranded PCs, are known to install Windows and other software for free on their computers at the request of customers.

"We support the use of legal software, but we cannot do anything if the customer does not want it because it is too costly," Randeri said.

Besides the established PC dealers, a number of "out-of-garage" operations exist in India that offer customers a full menu of pirated software.

"Microsoft should bring down the price of its software and offer better support," Randeri said. In Surat, a major city in Gujarat, Microsoft does not have a support office, he said, and dealers there must support customers themselves.

Microsoft representatives in India were not available to comment. In a statement last week it said it was "committed to working with the channel to help them understand the benefits of original software" and that it expected dealers to "support us in further spreading the message of the value of original software among the end consumers."

Microsoft offers Starter Editions of its OS in some markets, which are priced lower than full-featured versions. They have been bundled with PCs from some key Indian vendors, although they come with limitations, such as the number of applications that users can run simultaneously.

China To Back Down From "Real Name" Blog Rules

China is to back down from a plan to require bloggers to use their real names when they register Web logs, following an outcry over the proposal from the Internet industry, official media reported on Tuesday.

Instead, the government would promote a 'self-discipline code' that would encourage, but not mandate, bloggers to register under their own names, the report said, citing draft guidelines published by the Internet Society of China.

"The ISC, with the backing of the Ministry of Information Industry, is trying to rally industry players to sign up to the self-discipline code for the promotion of a less rigorous real-name system," state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

China, the world's second-largest Web market with some 140 million Internet users, has already imposed some controls.

The 'real-name' blog proposal was seen as another attempt to regulate free-wheeling Web content, but it triggered protests from the Internet industry and users, Xinhua said.

Some government departments had advocated the use of real names as a way to stop slander, pornography and the spread of what the ruling Communist Party sees as "harmful information."

China already routinely blocks Web sites for political content that runs counter to the government's views, and restricts participation in some on-line discussion groups.

It also imposes controls on Internet chatter about politically sensitive subjects, although postings on the country's more than 20 million blogs often go far beyond what is permissible in traditional state-run media.

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